

## Herculeanoboa

About 60 million years ago, just after the dinosaurs went extinct, a giant snake-like creature took its place as the biggest, baddest predator on the planet. This giant serpent looked something like a modern-day boa constrictor but behaved more like today's water-dwelling anaconda. These massive snakes were the world's largest vertebrae for 10 million years, they could grow up to 50 feet long and weighed about 1.25 tons, about the weight of a small car. The snake's enormous size is thought to be closely tied to the tropical climate of South America. Cold-blooded animals have metabolic rates that are influenced by the temperature of their environment, so a warm environment is critical. These giants ruled the regions of the Amazon and other tropical climates throughout South America and were able to eat any animal that caught its eye. In 2019, paleontologists stumbled upon fossilized vertebrae of the snake in these regions. While out on their excavation, scientists discovered massive vertebrae reaching the length of a school bus. Scientists found fossils from the river basin that held turtles with shells twice the size of manhole covers and extinct primitive crocodiles more than a dozen feet long. These smaller creatures were thought to be prey to the Herculeanoboa. These predators spent a majority of their time in or near the river bed, where they hide in the vegetation and ambush their prey, similar to modern day anacondas.